*Reasons for the Fall of the Roman Empire*

EVIDENCE NO. 1 Emperor Nero – reigned from 54AD – 68AD

Nero came to the throne at the age of 16. His mother tried to take over from him, so he had her killed in AD59. He also murdered his own wife Octavia, because he thought she was plotting against him.

Nero went to Greece (a Roman colony by this time) and ran in the Olympic Games and sang at music festivals. He won 200 gold medals. Some think he may have cheated in a few races and singing contests.

When he returned to Rome he had a grand plan to rebuild Rome. Half of Rome burnt down mysteriously and many were suspicious of Nero who had new plans already drawn. Nero blamed the new Christians and thousands of them were burnt alive.

Nero neglected the army and a revolt by the army broke out in France. The Roman general Galba came to Rome as the new Emperor. Nero committed suicide rather than be killed by his own army.

(Source: Sawyer and Townsend The Ancient World page 103)

EVIDENCE NO 2. Didius Julianus – Emperor for 60 days in 193AD.

In 193AD a new emperor, Pertinax was elected. He announced that he was going to cut down on the wild spending of the army. The Praetorian Guard (household troops of the emperors) killed Pertinax. They placed his head on a spear and marched to the centre of Rome, where they announced that they would sell the job of emperor to the highest bidder. Didius Julianus promised each guard a lot of money, so he was declared the winner by the Pretorian Guard who marched him off to the Senate and forced the Senate to vote Didius in as emperor. Four generals announced they would march on Rome to avenge the insult to Roman honour and also to try and make themselves emperor. Severus reached Rome first, had Didius Julianus beheaded and defeated the other generals.

(Source: Sawyer and Townsend The Ancient World page 105)

EVIDENCE NO. 3 Caligula – Emperor 37AD – 41AD

Soon after he became emperor, Caligula had his father-in-law and Marco, a man who helped him become emperor, executed. Caligula’s favourite sister died and he had her declared a deity (goddess). Caligula spent lavishly on public shows, games and displays; he had hundreds of ships tied together to make a temporary floating bridge so that he could ride across the Bay of Naples on horseback. By 39AD, the public treasury was near bankruptcy.

Caligula acted very strangely at times and some stories say that he tried to make his favourite horse a Senator and he ordered silence in the entire neighbourhood, to prevent the horse being disturbed. All his activities meant that he had less time available for governing the empire.

Three years after becoming emperor, Caligula announced he was a deity and began building temples and erecting statues to himself. Some people believed that Caligula was insane, but it is difficult to prove this with absolute certainty. However, he was carried away by the power that he had. He was assassinated by members of his own Praetorian Guard.

EVIDENCE NO.4 Constantine – Emperor 307AD -33AD

Under his rule large military border garrisons (places where troops lived) were broken up into a system of smaller militia units. This broke the army’s power to overthrow emperors, but it weakened the empire’s defence against attack.

(Source: Richards and English Out of the dark page 7)

EVIDENCE NO.5

Between 211AD and 284AD there were 23 Roman emperors – 20 of them were assassinated or died in civil wars.

(Source: Richards and English Out of the dark page 4)

EVIDENCE NO.6

The Roman soldiers from Italy were not keen on spending long years away from home, fighting on the borders of the Empire. This led to a shortage of soldiers. Laws were changed, in the second Century AD to allow non Romans to fight in the Roman army. When the Roman army was under great pressure the officers could not always depend on their men to fight to the end. Many of them were foreigners fighting only for money not for loyalty to Rome. Once this stage was reached, the Roman army had lost its fighting ability.

(Source: Sawyer and Townsend The Ancient World page 105)

EVIDENCE NO.7

The strength of the Roman army was in its lines that could not be broken. There was always a defence plan to cover any gaps that were made. Hannibal defeated the Romans in a battle in 217BC because he used elephants to break up the Roman line formation. A year later he knew that the Romans would attempt to break through his centre line, so he told his centre to retreat, still keeping the line together. The Roman army followed their standard way of attacking and so found themselves in a trap with the enemy around them. Hannibal destroyed the Roman army in this battle also.

(Source: Sawyer and Townsend The Ancient World pages 111-112)

EVIDENCE NO.8

The wealth and leisure available to the upper classes meant that they became uninterested in the proper government of Rome. They were too busy enjoying themselves to bother.

(Source: Bourke Time Tunnels page 16)

EVIDENCE NO.9

Study Source 1.5 page 10 of Big ideas or page 2 Out of the Dark. How would the size of the empire lead to its downfall?

EVIDENCE NO.10

High inflation. Prices went up, so money was worth less. It cost people more money to buy the same goods. The poor were taxed more than the wealthy. The poor became poorer.

(Source: Richards and English Out of the dark page 4)

EVIDENCE NO.11

The Roman army was very large and soldiers had to be fed and paid. Also, all the roads, public building and aqueducts etc cost money. How would the government obtain all this money?

EVIDENCE NO.12

Roman farmers did not use fertilizers, so over time the soil became poorer. This means that the crops deteriorated in both quality and quantity.

(Source: Richards and English Out of the dark page 4)

EVIDENCE NO.13

The Romans were surrounded by a number of Germanic tribes. The Romans called these people and anyone who lived outside the borders of the Empire, no matter how civilized or educated, barbarians. These barbarian tribes were increasingly on the attack against the empire.

(Source: Richards and English Out of the dark page 2)

EVIDENCE NO.14

Christianity: At first, Romans tortured and killed Christians. They were seen as a threat to society because they worshipped only one god (unlike the ancient Romans who worshipped many gods). Christians also refused to worship the emperor. Some Christian Romans became too preoccupied with the afterlife.

(Source: Saldais Oxford big ideas. History 8 page 11)

EVIDENCE NO.15

Population pressures: The Roman population was reducing due to plague, famine, lead poisoning (from lead water pipes) and war.

(Source: Saldais Oxford big ideas. History 8 page 11)